



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Braithwaite - The Inspiration of the Bible - 1905

8^C342
344.15

C8342.344.15



HARVARD
COLLEGE
LIBRARY

13
The
Inspiration
of the
Bible

By
WILLIAM C. BRAITHWAITE, L.L.B., B.A.

Published for the Yorkshire 1905 Committee of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of the Society of Friends, by Ernest E. Taylor, Bannisdale, Malton. Price 1d.

The statements and opinions contained in this series of pamphlets are made solely on the responsibility of their several authors and of the Yorkshire 1905 Committee, and not necessarily on that of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting.

C 8342.344.15

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY
OF TORONTO

The Inspiration of the Bible.

THE renewed interest that is being taken in the study of the Bible in the present day is a thing of the highest promise. Prof. Sanday says, "We may note as specially characteristic of the new century the strong appeal that is being made to the people as contrasted with the more limited public of scholars to which the theology of the last century addressed itself. A heightened religious consciousness and interest may be taken as a mark of the twentieth century, along with a striving after freshness and reality which is not content with simple acquiescence in ancient formulae." The translated Bible gave us the Puritan age of England; the freshly studied Bible of our own time may be the prelude to an equally important spiritual revival.

In what does the divine value—the Inspiration—of the Bible consist?

In approaching this subject we need the spirit of reverence which hallows every token of the presence of God, and the spirit of frankness which faces truth with courage and faith.

God Reveals Himself.

Before considering the Inspiration of the Bible, that is the divine element "in-breathed" into its pages, there is a prior question to be examined, the question of Revelation or the "unveiling" by God of His nature. A true conception of God involves the thought of a Being who from the first has been revealing Himself. So the fourth Gospel tells us, in language based on the creation-narrative in Genesis, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Self-revelation, that is to say, was a necessary function of God from the beginning. The writer cannot think of Him without also thinking of His word. Let us begin with the conviction clear in our own minds that God has always been communicating as much of Himself as was possible to us; on His part there has been an everlasting revealing disposition.

If this be so, we naturally ask to what then has the slow progress of Revelation been due? And if it is not to be imputed to any divine slackness or neglect, we have to search for the cause in the imperfections of the human channels through which alone the Father could in any adequate way manifest Himself to men. Nature, apart from man, reveals much of the Creator, His majesty, wisdom, sense of beauty, but has no clear message to tell of His righteousness or of His love. But because the spirit of man is the crown of all created things, and is itself akin to the divine, a higher revelation of God has been possible *through humanity*, a revelation which makes known the divine righteousness and love. Man himself has been the great instrument for revelation, the place where God could speak, if He could speak anywhere.

Revelation through Humanity.

This revelation through humanity has meant at every stage a self-condescension on the part of God to the limitations of our humanity. It has had to be made with the help of words that we could understand; and all words are limited in meaning by the facts of human experience out of which they have been derived. For example, the greatest of all our words for God, Father, is limited in meaning by the noblest conception of Fatherhood that we are able to form with the help of our experience, and cannot be a complete word for expressing the divine character. It ought certainly to include all the ideal qualities of motherhood. We have indeed no means of fully expressing that which is infinite and transcends human experience. In this lies the danger of creeds, which have their value in an age of nebulous thinking as an aid to the clear definition of truth, but cramp religion if they assume to limit the expanding horizons of the illumined soul. Again, revelation has been necessarily limited, even when it has come not simply through words but through the much greater thing, human life. Our early Friends in their conscious possession in their hearts of the divine life began by claiming an infallibility for themselves similar to the claim of infallibility that has often been made for the Bible. It was only as the

result of painful experience that they learnt to recognize that though they possessed a measure of the divine life, the fallible human nature and human mind still remained. We may indeed reverently say that even the culminating revelation of God in the "Word become flesh" was necessarily only a partial expression of the being of God; there was a self-condescension to our limitations in our Lord's voluntary acceptance of a human life, and it was through that human life *and limited by it* that He manifested the Father. A mathematical illustration may perhaps make my point clear. In a limited world which only contained the two dimensions of length and breadth instead of the three of length, breadth and thickness, a cube could only be expressed as a square or a sphere as a circle. The circle would not adequately reveal the sphere, but it would be the most perfect revelation possible in such a limited world.

Revelation then, even in its supreme case, is the expression of the divine with the help of human personality. It involves in every case a blending of the two elements, and it would be strange if we claimed for the Book a position in this respect which we do not claim for our Lord. Its progress has depended upon slow development of the human instrument; it has not been due to a variable disposition on the part of God, who has always been revealing just as much of Himself as men have been able to bear. Among men there has been a slow development of spiritual vision analogous to the gradual growth of the powers of the natural eye, and to the development of such a faculty as artistic taste. The Old Testament contains a progressive revelation of this kind, made to a race that seems, even among Semitic people, to have been specially sensitive to spiritual truth. The great gift of the Hebrew race to the world lay in the fact that it had developed a spiritual eye. God did not see fit to blind patriarchs and kings and prophets "with the excess of light." The moral progress of Israel was achieved step by step. "Not all at once," says Kent in his *HISTORY OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE*, "but by a long and painful process were the barbarian nomads developed into a nation with a message and mission to humanity."

Moral Perspective in the Old Testament.

A right understanding of this progressive character of revelation lies at the foundation of profitable study of the Old Testament. The student must continually be placing its earlier teaching in what may be called "moral perspective" with its later, and bringing all into perspective with the full standard of righteousness declared in Christ. He will then find how crude standards of conduct are constantly giving place to a higher righteousness and crude conceptions of God are changed into a fuller vision. On moral questions the need for this perspective is everywhere tacitly admitted; even the men, for example, who justify war from the Old Testament shrink from approving the atrocities with which in Old Testament times it was waged under plea of divine sanction. As Dr. Sanday says, "In all ages it has been recognized that there were some things in the Bible and especially in the Old Testament which could not be transferred as they stood to a later day. For instance, no one in Christian times would have thought of justifying the practice of polygamy by the example of the patriarchs and kings of Israel. And for more than one generation past, in this country at least, no one would have thought of finding a similar justification for the institution of slavery." (ORACLES OF GOD, p. 77). Anyone who faces an Adult School class week after week knows the absolute necessity of recognizing this moral perspective in the Old Testament in dealing with men to-day. We cannot attribute to God in past ages action which revolts our consciences now; we have to admit that the inspired writers often misunderstood the God they were revealing, especially by crediting Him with like passions and conduct with themselves on matters where their own standard of conduct was simply the low moral standard of their day. The body of Christ's ethical teaching that goes under the name of the Sermon on the Mount shows clearly that our Lord regards the earlier revelation of the moral law as fragmentary and rudimentary, to be filled out by His teaching; He does not think of it as a perfect or final expression of His Father's mind. The "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time" becomes the "but I say unto you" of a deeper moral teaching. In like manner, when James

and John, the two "sons of thunder," suggest that they should call down fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritan village, as Elijah did upon the captains of Ahaziah, Christ rejected the precedent and rebuked them, saying in words which, whether part of Luke or not, have the ring of authenticity, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them." (Luke ix, 54, 55; 2 Kings i, 10, 12).

Inspiration, the Divine Element in the Bible.

With this conception in our minds of the progressive character of Old Testament revelation, we may profitably approach the related question of the Inspiration of the Bible. After what has been said, a definition of this may be at once suggested,—the Inspiration is the *divine element in the Bible*, to be separated off from the human elements, partly as the result of study, but mainly by the exercise of the faculty of spiritual judgment which each disciple may possess, and which has been possessed and exercised by the church universal. The great Revealer still reveals, and His light given to each humble-hearted disciple is the surest of all aids to Bible study, where it is waited for and known.

An illustration may show what I mean by saying that we are to separate off the divine from the human elements. The early chapters of Genesis are to be regarded as what we may term "prophecy backwards," that is to say, they are the reconstruction by an inspired writer of the spiritual history of an unknown past, just as in some passages of prophecy, as we commonly know it, the inspired writer traces out the working of great moral and religious principles across the uncertain future. They may of course be something more because they incorporate a mass of traditional facts, but they are chiefly this. The value of such a story as the Fall is not in the facts, but in the inspired insight which realised and expressed, in a pictorial or symbolical form of great beauty, the crisis through which mankind at some stage of its development must have passed. In moving up from the merely animal life, man must have acquired at some point of his growth the faculty, which no animal possesses, of knowing the distinction between good and evil; he must have become, whether in Eden

or elsewhere, conscious of a moral law which claimed his obedience ; and our own experience teaches us that from that moment a conflict must have been waged between the drag backwards of the lower nature and the demands of the higher law ; the law in Paul's phrase made sin known, and "sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled and slew." (Rom. vii. 7-11). So again in the Creation stories themselves. The Genesis narratives have no doubt taken shape either from the Babylonian accounts known to us or from some earlier traditional form. They have therefore no scientific or historical value. They represent the conceptions of Semitic peoples as to the origins of life. But, religiously, the Hebrew accounts are greatly superior to the Babylonian : in them we have a severe and dignified monotheism instead of an exuberant and grotesque polytheism ; we have a Creator supreme and absolute from the beginning instead of a stubborn conquest of chaos by the gods ; we have the omnipotence and, what is still more significant, the goodness of God clearly marked by the perfect fashioning of each stage of creation according to the divine purpose, so that God saw that it was good both in its own order and as leading to higher good. It is in this religious element, this "monotheizing" of the narrative, that we find its true inspiration.

This view of inspiration focusses attention on the elements of permanent value in the Bible. We change, as Dr. Horton has said, the unvarying monotony of the photograph for the life of the landscape, instinct with the breathing of the Spirit of God. We find that the Old Testament is a divine library, in which history, allegory, fiction and philosophy, prose, poetry and prophecy have all been used as modes of revelation. Instead of being a mere string of texts the Bible is seen to be a wonderfully varied and yet harmoniously connected divine literature.

Elements of Enduring Inspiration.

Let us consider the chief of these elements of enduring inspiration.

(1) The Bible is a *great collection of the biographies of heroes of faith*. Revelation, as we have seen, has been at each stage

a thing of vivid individual experience. These experiences form the landmarks of man's spiritual history. Coming under the divine hand, patriarchs and prophets have been inspired and illuminated, but have remained in many respects subject to the moral limitations of their age. In these respects their example has no special authority or validity for us. That which has lifted them above their age has been their Faith: they have exhibited in their seeking after God the very highest qualities of faith and love, of patience, and obedience to the light, and because of this supreme quality in their lives their biographies accordingly have high value even to generations that have reached fuller knowledge of God. The spiritual capacities of these Old Testament heroes of faith only enabled them to advance by gradual stages our knowledge of the Most High, but they were men fronting the dawn and living in the spirit of Mrs. Hamilton King's lines,

"Hath not God written somewhat in thy face
To fade and flicker for a few to see?
Write it out large in words that will not fade."

(2) But the Old Testament is something more than a collection of the biographies of heroes of faith. Israel itself was *as a nation consciously under the divine hand*. At first, when Moses became the religious leader of his people, Jehovah was regarded as the exclusive God of Israel and Israel as the people of Jehovah. To this tiny nation, chosen from all the nations of the earth, God had been, as we read in Psalm xviii. 20, "a God of deliverances." He was the great person who moved across the face of their history.

(3) The result is that in the Old Testament we have a record written *sub specie aeterni*, under the figure of the eternal, *history told so as to exhibit its spiritual content, poetry of the soul rather than of the senses, wisdom-literature concerned with conduct in accord with the divine will, prophecy filled with insight into the mind of the Most High and with knowledge of the deepest needs and aspirations of men*. The standpoint throughout is the divine standpoint, the record is the unveiling to us of the divine mind. I have seen an old Irish manuscript of the gospels, the Book of Kells, where,

behind the figure of the evangelist John, is drawn on the outer margins of the leaf the head and hands and feet of a mystical divine figure. So behind the Bible itself we see the lineaments of its heavenly Author.

(4) The Bible however does not only reveal God: it is *the book of a broad humanity*, acquainting us with man in his depths and in his heights. Each man carries in his own nature an epitome of the world, the history of its past, the promise of its future. At one end of his being is the beast, "the ghost of the brute that is walking and haunting us yet:" at the other the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. And the Bible compasses with ready mastery this vast range of human nature. Especially is this the case with the Prophets. They possessed as their essential faculty a keenness of vision which penetrated through the outward seeming of life to its inner significance: they were men who saw things with a clearer perception of their true values than others. They pierced below the surface of conduct, and fastened upon the underlying issues of good and evil: they were quick and powerful to separate the right from the wrong, and were Seers because of their insight into the moral conditions of the time. Accordingly we still turn to Isaiah and Jeremiah for inspiration on the great problems of national righteousness. As part of its broad humanity the Bible is grandly honest. Its portraits are living men and women, sinning, struggling, triumphing, not doctored photographs, like the current biographies of our own days. In consequence the Bible is singularly free from all that savours of cant or hypocrisy.

(5) The New Testament, of course, has a special value of its own. *It contains practically the whole of the authentic records of that Life which is the supreme gospel of God's grace. It contains further the book which gives the beginnings of the history of the spiritual Israel, the Christian church.* This book of the first Acts of the Spirit is not complete: we are living in the same order of spiritual experience as the first Christians, and must not make the Bible artificial and unreal by separating off their age from our own: chapters have been added to this book in all the centuries since and are being

added to-day, wherever the Spirit of Christ is given free course in the hearts of disciples.

(6) Above all, *the Bible deals with life rather than with the institutions, creeds and ceremonies in which religion has dressed and often suffocated itself.* Dogmas are like the dry specimens of nature in the museum: the lives of the Saints of all ages are like the wondrous life of nature itself under the open sky.

A Modern Book.

The views of revelation and inspiration which I have attempted to express make the Bible again a modern book. Its writers are no longer men standing apart from our life, cut off from our experiences: the Bible is no longer separated by an impassable gulf from other books. We recognize that its inspiration varies in quality and degree, and is not different in kind from the wisdom that has come to holy souls in all ages, "making them friends of God and prophets." We understand that the Bible is pre-eminent over other inspired literature, partly because of the purity and fulness of its inspiration, and partly because of the unique importance of the subject matter of which it treats. We feel that the penetrative insight into God's purposes which marked the Hebrew prophets still brings a vision of the divine which qualifies men to-day to be seers and prophets. The spiritual growth and discipline of those who first exalted the universal supremacy and righteousness of Jehovah did not belong to a different order of experience from the preparation of Francis of Assisi, or George Fox or Bunyan or Wesley for his spiritual mission. And so we realize that the cycle of revelation is not closed and God still speaks through His children "in many parts and in many modes" for the needs of successive ages of men.

Our object in studying the Bible is to gain through the revelation a knowledge of the nature and the will of God which shall inspire our own lives and service. The intellectual comprehension of the revelation is only the first step: there must be also the devotional feasting upon it for the nourishment of our souls. Bengel has well said, "apply thy whole self to the text: apply its whole contents to thyself." The two processes are both needed: they are not alternatives to each

other. It is all important that we should recognize that to understand is not necessarily to receive, and that until truth is received and appropriated it cannot affect conduct and character.

Out of the large body of Christ's teaching on this subject three main points may be taken :

Humility of Heart. We must be teachable (see Matt. v, 3, 5, 6; xi. 25-30).

Receptivity of Soul. We must have ears to hear. In the Parable of the Sower the entrance of the word depends on the receptivity or otherwise of the soil. It is dulness of spiritual vision that still limits our sight of truth. We need to pray for enlightenment as Paul does in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph. i, 15-23, iii, 14-21) so that all the windows of our heart may be open to the day.

Strenuous Purpose to do the Truth. In the teaching of Christ the difference is fundamental between the man who heard His sayings and did them and the man who heard and did not. It is the difference between Rock and Sand, between the life of service and strength that springs from a character consolidated in the truth and the weak life that cannot endure the shock of trial or temptation because its foundation is sand.

The following pamphlets have also been published by the Yorkshire 1905 Committee (1d. each, post free) :—

- "What does the Society of Friends stand for?" by *W. C. Braithwaite*.
- "For Fellowship and Freedom," by *Joan M. Fry*.
- "Applied Christianity and War," by *Joshua Rowntree*.
- "The Spiritual Legacies of George Fox," by *Chas. H. Spurgeon*.
- o.p.* "The Test of a Church," by *Rufus M. Jones*.
- "The Lay Ministry," by *John Wilhelm Rowntree*.
- John Bright on "The True Greatness of a Nation."
- Eight "Envelope Series." $\frac{1}{4}$ each.
- "The Atonement," by *Rufus M. Jones*.
- "The Service of the Church," by *T. E. Harvey*.
- "The Right Relationship between Parents and Children," by *Constance M. Rowntree*.
- "The Responsibilities of Membership in the Society of Friends," by *A. W. Richardson*.
- "The Missionary Spirit of the Early Friends," by *Joshua Rowntree*.

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

DUE DEC 13 1947

C 8342.344.15

The Inspiration of the Bible.

Widener Library

002947981



3 2044 081 817 801